

His augrym stones, layen faire apart,
On shelves couched at his beddes heed,
His presse ycovered with a faldyng reed,
And all above ther lay a gay sautrie,
On which he made anyghtes melodie
So swetely, that al the chambre rong,
And Angelus ad virginem, he song;
And after that he song the kynges noote;
ful often blessed was his myrie throte,
And thus this sweete clerk his tyme spent
After his freendes fyndyng and his rente.

THIS carpenter hadde wedded newe a
wyf,
Whiche that he loved moore than his lyf;
Of eighteteene yeer she was of age,
Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,
for she was yong and wyld, and he was old,
And demed hymself been lik a cokewold.
He knew nat Catoun, for his wit was rude,
That bad man sholde wedde his similitude.
Men sholde wedden after hire estaat,
for youthe and elde is often at debaat;
But sith that he was fallen in the snare,
He moste endure, as oother folk, his care.

HIR was this yonge wyf, and therewithal,
As any wezele, hir body gent and smal.
A ceint she wered, ybarred al of silk;
A barmclooth eek as whit as morne milk
Upon hir lendes, ful of many a goore;
Whit was hir smok, and broyden al bifore,
And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,
Of colblak silk withinne and eek withoute.
The tapes of hir white voluper
Were of the same suyte of hir coler;
Hir filet brood, of silk and set ful hye,
And sikertly she hadde a likerous eye.
ful smale y pulled were hire browes two,
And tho were bent, and blake as any sloo.
She was ful moore blisful on to see
Than is the newe perejonette tree,
And softer than the wolfe is of a wether;
And by hir girdel heeng a purs of lether,
Tasseled with grene and perled with latoun.
In al this world, to seken up and down,
Ther nas no man so wys that koude thenche
So gay a popelote, or swich a wenche.
ful brighter was the shynyng of hir hewe
Than in the Tour the noble yforges newe.

AT of hir song, it was as loude and
berne
As any swalwe chiterynge on a berne.
Therto she koude skippe and make game,
As any kyde, or calf, folwyng his dame.
Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth,
Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.
Wynsyng she was, as is a joly colt;
Long as a mast, and uprighte as a bolt.
A brooch sche baar upon hir love coler,
As brood as is the boos of a bokeler;
Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye;
She was a prymerole, a piggesnyce
for any lord to ligen in his bedde,
Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.

NOW, sire, and eft, sire, so bifel the cas,
That on a day this hende Nicholas,
fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye
Whil that hir housbonde was at Oseneye,
As clerkes ben ful subtil and ful queynte,
And prively he caughte hire by the queynte,
And seyde, ywis, But if ich have my wille,
for deeme love of thee, lemman, I spille;
And heeld hire harde by the haunche bones,
And seyde, Lemman, love me al atones,
Or I wol dyen, also God me save!
And she sproong, as a colt doth in the trave,
And with hir heed sche wryed faste away,
And seyde, I wol nat kisse thee, by my fey!
Why, lat be! quod she, lat be, Nicholas!
Or I wol erie out, Harrow, and Allas!
Do wey youre handes, for your curteisye!

THIS Nicholas gan mercy for to crye,
And spak so faire, and profred him so faste,
That she hir love hym graunted atte laste,
And swoor hir ooth, by Seint Thomas of Kent,
That she wol been at his comandement
Whan that she may hir leyser wel espie.
Myn housbonde is so ful of jalousie,
That but ye wayte wel and been privee,
I woot right wel I nam but deed, quod she;
Ye moste been ful deerne, as in this cas.
Nay, therof care thee noght, quod Nicholas,
A clerk hadde litherly biset his whyte
But if he koude a carpenter bigyle.
And thus they been accorded and ysworn
To wayte a tyme, as I have told biforn.
Whan Nicholas had doon thus everideel,
And thakked hire aboute the lendes weel,
He kist hire sweete, and taketh his sawtrie,
And pleyeth faste, and maketh melodie.
Thanne fil it thus, that to the paryssh chirche,
Christes owene werkes for to wirche,
This goode wyf went on an haliday;
Hir forheed shoon as bright as any day,
So was it wasshen whan she leet hir werk.

NOW was ther of that chirche a paryssh clerk,
The which that was ycleped Absolon;
Crul was his heer and as the gold it shoon,
And strouted as a fanne, large and brode,
ful streight and evene lay his joly shode.
His rode was reed, his eyen greye as goos;
With Powles wyndow corven on his shoos,
In hosen rede he wente fetisly.
Yclad he was ful smal and proprely,
Al in a kirtel of a lyght waget,
ful faire and thikke been the poyntes set;
And ther upon he hadde a gay surplis,
As whit as is the blosme upon the rys.
A myrie child he was, so God me save,
Wel koude he laten blood, and clippe and shave,
And maken a chartre of lond or acquitaunce.
In twenty manere koude he trippe and daunce,
After the scole of Oxenforde tho,
And with his legges casten to and fro,
And pleyen songs on a small rubible;
Therto he song som tyme a loud quynnyble,
And as wel koude he pleye on his giterne.

In al the toun nas brewhous ne tavern
That he ne visited with his solas,
Ther any gaylard tappestere was.
But, sooth to seyn, he was somdel squaymous
Of fartyng, and of speche daungerous.
THIS Absolon, that jolif was and gay,
Gooth with a sencer on the haliday,
Sensyng the wyves of the parysshe faste,
And many a lovely look on hem he caste;
To loke on hire hym thoughte a myrie lyf,
She was so propre, and sweete, and likerous.
I dar wel seyn if she hadde been a mous,
And he a cat, he wold hire hente anon.
This paryssh clerk, this joly Absolon,
hath in his herte swich a love/longyng,
That of no wyf ne took he noon offryng;
for curteisie, he seyde, he wolde noon.

THE moone, whan it was nyght, ful brighte
shoon,
And Absolon his gyterne hath ytake,
for paramours he thoghte for to wake;
And forth he gooth, jolif and amorous,
Til he cam to the carpenteres hous
A litel after cokkes had yrowe,
And dressed hym up by a shot wyndowe
That was upon the carpenteres wal.
He syngeth in his voys gentil and smal,
Now, deere lady, if thy wille be,
I pray yow that ye wole thynke on me,
ful wel acordaunt to his gytternyng.
This carpenter awook, and herde hym synge,
And spak unto his wyf, and seyde anon,
What, Alison! herestow nat Absolon
That chaunteth thus under oure boures wal?
And she answerde hir housbonde therewithal,
Yis, God woot, John, I heere it every del.
This passeth forth; what wol ye bet than weel?

RO day to day this joly Absolon
So woth hire that hym is wo bigon;
He waketh al the nyght and al the day,
he kembeth his lokkes brode, and made hym gay,
he woth hire by meenes and brocage;
And swoor he wolde been hir owene page;
He syngeth, brokkynge as a nyghtyngale;
He sente hire pymment, meeth, and spiced ale,
And wafres pyping boot out of the gleede,
And for she was of tounne, he profreth meede;
for som folk wol ben wonnen for richesse,
And somme for strokes, and somme for gen-
tillesse.

Somtyme to shewe his lightnesse & maistrye
He pleyeth Herodes upon a scaffold hye,
But what availleth hym, as in this cas?
She loveth so this hende Nicholas,
That Absolon may blowe the bukkes horn;
He ne had for his labour but a scorn;
And thus she maketh Absolon hire ape,
And al his earnest turneth til a jape.
ful sooth is this proverbe, it is no lye,
Men seyn right thus, Alwey the nye slye
Maketh the ferre levee to be looth;
for though that Absolon be wood or wrooth,

Bycause that he fer was from hire sighte,
This nye Nicholas stood in his lighte.
NOW bere thee wel, thou hende Nicholas,
for Absolon may waille and synge, Allas!
And so bifel it on a Saturday,
This carpenter was goon til Osenay,
And hende Nicholas and Absolon
Acorded been to this conclusioun,
That Nicholas shal shapen hym a wyle,
This sely jalous housbonde to bigyle;
And, if so be the game wente aright,
She sholde slepen in his arm al nyght,
for this was his desir and hire also.
And right anon, withouten wordes mo,
This Nicholas no lenger wolde tarie,
But dooth ful softe unto his chambre carie
Bothe mete and drynke for a day or tweye;
And to hire housbonde bad hire for to seye,
If that he axed after Nicholas,
She sholde seye she nyste where he was;
Of al that day she saugh hym nat with eye;
She trowed that he was in maladye,
for, for no cry, hir mayde koude hym calle,
He nolde answer for nothyng that myghte falle.
This passeth forth al thilke Saturday,
That Nicholas stille in his chambre lay,
And eet and sleepe, or dide what hym leste;
Til Sonday that the sonne gooth to reste
This sely carpenter hath greet merveye
Of Nicholas, or what thyng myghte hym eyle.
And seyde, I am adrad, by Seint Thomas,
It stondeth nat aright with Nicholas,
God shilde that he deyde sodeynly;
This world is now ful tikel sikertly;
I saugh today a cors yborn to chirche,
That now on Monday last I saugh hym wirche.
Go up, quod he unto his knave anon,
Clepe at his dore, or knokke with a stoon,
Looke how it is, and tel me boldely.
This knave gooth him up ful sturdily,
And at the chambre dore whil that he stood,
He cride and knokked as that he were wood:
What how! what do ye, maister Nicholas?
How may ye slepen al the longe day?
But al for noght, he herde nat a word.
An hole he foond ful lowe upon a bord,
Ther as the cat was wont in for to crepe;
And at that hole he looked in ful depe,
And at the laste he hadde of hym a sighte.
This Nicholas sat gapyng evere uprighte,
As he had kikid on the newe moone.
Adoun he gooth, and tolde his maister soone
In what array he saugh that ilke man.
This carpenter to blessen hym bigan,
And seyde, Help us, Seinte frydeswyde!
A man woot litel what hym shal bityde;
This man is falle with his astromye
In som woodnesse, or in som agonye.
I thoghte ay wel how that it sholde be,
Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee.
Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man,
That noght but oonly his bileve kan.
So ferde another clerk with astromye;